

Fact Sheet

Diarrhoea in the Horse

Diarrhoea in horses

Diarrhoea is a common ailment in adult horses which is mostly innocuous but in very rare cases can be fatal and therefore must be taken seriously and investigated by your veterinary surgeon.

There has been more recent research looking at the microbiome of the horse's intestine and hopefully this will shed light on the cause of some of the cases where a diagnosis is never reached. Only 30 percent of cases in one study had a definitive cause diagnosed.



Biosecurity

Biosecurity should always be considered, particularly if there are any immunocompromised people involved in the care of the animal as some causes of diarrhoea in the horse can transmit to humans.

The 2 main groups of diarrhoea

Simplistically, diarrhoea can be broken down into two main groups:

- Idiopathic (unknown cause)
- Acute colitis

This list is not exhaustive and your vet will be able to guide you further on each cause as required.



Idiopathic diarrhoea

It is often reported that horses have a free water phase of faecal expulsion. There is no clear cause behind this, although speculation surrounding fibre digestion in the colon has been put forward. Changing the diet can help these clinical signs with an improvement in the dietary fibre being helpful. Ideally, you should ask your vet to run blood work to ensure no other disease is ongoing and a faecal analysis should be performed to rule out any infectious aetiologies.

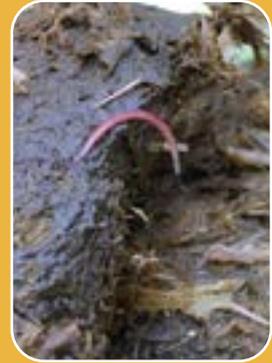
Sand enteropathies are location dependant but can lead to either chronic or acute diarrhoea depending on the severity of the sand accumulation. Faecal analysis for sand can be helpful but to get a definitive diagnosis radiographs of your horse's abdomen are required.

Horses will often present with diarrhoea after being moved onto fresh green grass. Normally this should resolve within 24hrs especially if moved off grass and onto their normal diet. The faeces will often be very green and watery and often horses will suffer from this every spring.

Diarrhoea in the Horse | Fact Sheet

Acute colitis

These are often the most severe cases and can be fatal. Horses will often present with severe very quick onset watery diarrhoea and will be dull, lethargic and often have a high temperature. Immediate veterinary attention is required and often referral to an equine hospital. The causal agent in these cases is frequently difficult to ascertain. Possible causes can include: antibiotic induced diarrhoea, salmonellosis, red worm and clostridial overgrowth. Salmonella and clostridial diseases can infect humans and care should be taken if either of these are diagnosed. The inciting cause can be something as a mild colic episode that leads to a suspected imbalance in the microbiome within the colon.



Diagnostics

In all cases of diarrhoea a full blood panel should be run to assess if there are any abnormalities that would necessitate further intervention from your vet. They may also take a faecal analysis to run:

- Worm egg count
- Sand: Faecal analysis for sand is notoriously inaccurate as often it will remain in the colon without passing into the faeces or can pass through with no accumulation within the colon, therefore radiographs should be taken
- Assessment for bacterial infections



Diagnostics

The treatment of the diarrhoea will be dependant on the diagnosed course.

In many cases it might be as simple as dietary modification and time whilst other more serious forms will require hospitalisation and intensive care.

To ensure that your horse receives the best medical care it is advisable to speak to your vet as soon as your horse has diarrhoea.



For further information, please contact your local VetPartners Equine Veterinary Practice on:

vetPartners

VetPartners Equine has a diverse range of practices and expertise within the group.

Together with our practices, our focus is on providing an excellent service to our equine clients. No two practices are the same, and we understand and embrace that independent spirit.